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BLOG MARKETING PLAN FOR THE CASE COMPANY

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BLOGIMARKKINOINTISUUNNITELMA KOHDEYRITYKSELLE

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli etsiä tietoa blogimarkkinoinnista ja saada aikaan blogimarkkinointisuunnitelma kohdeyritykselle. Yksi tarkoitus oli myös tutkia blogien hyötyä ja tärkeyttä markkinoinnissa. Kohdeyritys on liikuntapalveluja- ja tuotteita asiakkaille tarjoava yritys. Kohdeyrityksen palveluita ovat muun muassa Personal Trainer- koulutukset, yrityshyvinvointipalvelut, kahvakuulakoulutukset ja muut ammattitason koulutukset. Tuotteita ovat liikunta-alan erilaisia tuotteita kuten urheiluvaatteet ja välineet. Tutkimus selvitti blogimarkkinoinnin hyötyjä ja miten kohdeyritys voisi toteuttaa blogimarkkinointia.

Teoriaosassa käsiteltiin markkinointia, sosiaalista mediaa, sosiaalisten median markkinointia ja sisältömarkkinointia. Empiirisessä osassa luotiin blogimarkkinointisuunnitelma kohdeyritykselle käyttäen aiemmin opittua teoriaa taustana ja käyttämällä opinnäytetyön kirjoittajan omia kokemuksia ja näkemyksiä.

Opinnäytetyön alussa käsiteltiin työn tarkoituksia ja tavoitteita ja esiteltiin kohdeyritys jonka jälkeen teoriaosassa ensimmäisenä käsiteltiin markkinointia ja markkinointimix strategiaa. Tämän jälkeen esiteltiin sosiaalinen media, sosiaalisen median markkinointia ja sisältömarkkinointia. Empiirisessä tutkimuksessa käytettiin teoriaa sovellettuna sopivaksi blogimarkkinointiin ja kohdeyrityksen tarpeisiin ja mahdollisuuksiin. Empiirisessä osassa käytettiin myös vertailukehittämistä jossa verrattiin ja opiskeltiin menestyneitä blogeja ja käytettiin joitain näistä opittuja asioita kohdeyrityksen markkinointisuunnitelmaan.

Tutkimuksen tuloksena blogimarkkinointisuunnitelma kohdeyritykselle tukena vertailukehitys kahdesta menestyksekkäästä blogista, periaatteita markkinointimix strategiasta ja statistiikasta. Tutkimuksen perusteella voidaan myös todeta, että tulos ei ainoastaan ole toimiva kohdeyritykselle, mutta sitä voidaan soveltaa myös muihin yrityksiin samoilla periaatteilla. Tutkimuksessa myös todetaan blogien huonoja puolia markkinoijan näkökulmasta. Tuloksena voidaankin todeta, että blogit eivät ole aina niin tehokkaita kuin luullaan. Blogimarkkinoinnin toteuttaminen vaatii paljon kärsivällisyyttä, koska niiden tulokset eivät ole niin näkyviä kuin esimerkiksi muiden sosiaalisen median työkalujen kanssa. Blogeja pitää myös kirjoittaa säännöllisesti, koska säännöllisyydellä luodaan säännöllisiä asiakkaita mutta myös jonkun näköinen tavoite. Blogia jota päivitetään epäsäännöllisesti, on vaikea seurata lukijoiden näkökulmasta, mutta taas säännöllisyys tarkoittaa, että kirjoittajalla on tarpeeksi hyvää sisältöä siihen.

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The purpose of this thesis was to study blog marketing and come up with a blog marketing plan for the case company. The purpose was also to study the benefits and importance of blogs in marketing field. The case company is providing different kinds of services and products of well-being and exercising. The services contain for example personal trainer- courses, kettlebell courses and corporate's workplace wellbeing. The products the case company provides are clothing and exercise equipment. This thesis examined the benefits of blog marketing and how could the case company apply blog marketing.

Theory created groundwork to this thesis and was complemented with empirical part. Theory studied marketing, social media marketing and content marketing. Empirical part was a blog marketing plan for the case company applying the theory.

The first part of the thesis introduced the purposes and objectives of this thesis continued with an introduction to the case company. This part also contained the theory part. The theory part was a study of marketing, marketing mix, social media and social media marketing and content marketing.

Empirical part was a blog marketing plan for the case company using the theory and applying it according to the author's experience and knowledge to fit the possibilities of the case company. Empirical part also included benchmarking to compare and study successful blogs.

The result of the thesis was blog marketing plan for the case company that was supported by benchmarking of two successful blogs, strategic principles of marketing mix and statistics. From the result it can be concluded that this applies not only for the case company but it can also be used by other companies using same principles. But also some problems for blog marketing were mentioned. Blog marketing is often misunderstood for its efficiency. Writing a blog in marketing purposes actually requires lots of work and input. Blogs for marketing purposes needs to be updated regularly. Irregular blogging is difficult for the reader's point of view. On the other hand, regular blog posting means that the writer must have enough good, new content to write about.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In today's world when we can access all over the globe just by browsing the internet it emphasizes the famous saying; the world is shrinking. Businesswise it is a great opportunity to grow awareness and revenue by reaching more people rapidly with low-cost effort. Social media plays a big part of today's tools for marketers as it has shown to be effective when used correctly. Partly the reason why social media is so great and remarkable is its accessibility for everyone. It has fewer limits than any other marketing tool such as television advertisement and as well it is free in the most cases. These are the reason that makes it so interesting, fascinating and above all, challenging. The case company is looking for creating customers a way to be more visible, attractive and trustworthy.

Spartan Gear, the case company, is implementing different ways in social media to get attention and awareness. The company's marketing is mostly based on social media and this is why I got interested on this topic as I want to learn new ways for marketing and how to apply it specifically to certain types of business. The study of this topic is interesting for its endless possibilities and rapidly changing environment.

This thesis is to find and study principles behind blogging and how could it be used for the case company to increase profitability. Blogging itself is a wide concept therefore the focus is on marketing perspective.

2 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THESIS

This project is for the case company Spartan Gear Ltd. Spartan Gear is looking for ways to grow awareness of the products but also the company itself and to get new customers and keep the old ones by building stronger relationship between customers and the case company. Spartan Gear has been planning to start writing a blog and therefore this thesis is to open up the new tool for them to understand it better but also to help to conduct the principles of blogging and blog marketing. This thesis is to help the case company to open up the concept of blogging and the principles behind it in the marketing perspective. As blogging is wide topic it can be hard to understand when it comes to professionalism and effective marketing.

The expected outcome is to have understanding of blogs and blog marketing which helps the company to decide whether it is worth to start their own blog. This thesis is also to find out an effective way to do blog marketing and improve visibility for the case company with a blog marketing plan.

While there is increasing number of different kinds of marketing tools, it is important to recognize good tools from time-wasting tools. The latest platform may not be the best or suitable for the case company. One objective of this project is to recognize the marketing benefits of blog marketing.

2.1 Research objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to study effective blogging marketing and create a blog marketing plan for the case company. To reach the objective there are research questions that needs be answered to. The main research question of this thesis is:

How can the case company use blogs for marketing purposes?

And support questions are:

What are the benefits of blog marketing?

How to acquire new customers?

How to connect with customers?

How to inform customers about products and services?

These questions are helping in determining the goal of the thesis and also to widen the perspective of the topic. The case company does not have their own blog but their activity in other channels of social media is strong. Therefore the objective is to provide a blog marketing plan that is applicable for the case company.

2.2 Conceptual framework

This part is to explain theoretically planned implementation of the structure of this thesis. At the very beginning the purpose is to get a general idea of the case company and in which area of business it operates. After that the goal is to get profound understanding of social media and social media marketing – what is it and how it is used. This is crucial part as without theoretically and practically understanding these, it is impossible to create this thesis. To be able to do the thesis properly the means of research must be decided. How to search information, and how to apply it were part of the research questions. After the research important part is to apply the found information and make a conclusion according to the nature of the information and expectations of the case company to create a blog marketing plan.

The main purpose of this thesis is to create a blog marketing plan for the case company but also to look useful information about blogging and blog marketing, helping the company to decide whether they should start blogging or not. The case company already have strong participation in social media but to add different approach to attract customers, blog marketing could be something the case company is looking for.

The figure 1 is to demonstrate the different parts of this thesis. Begin with theory and defining marketing, social media and social media marketing. Defining these will help the reader to understand the thesis and principles behind the results. The next thing is to study the definition of content marketing and why it plays important part of this thesis but in blog marketing overall. Case company will also be introduced

with their current social media marketing activity. The result will be a plan for the case company to do blog marketing.

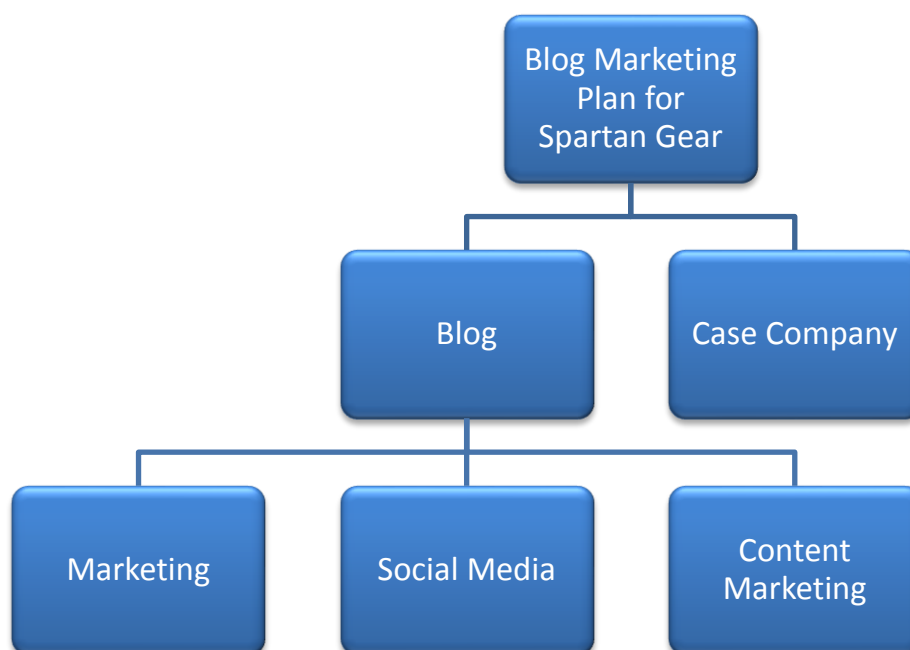


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Figure 1 describes the different topics that are needed due to create the blog marketing plan. Marketing will introduce the definition of marketing but also one of the famous marketing practices called marketing mix or with its other name “the four Ps of marketing”. Marketing part will also describe marketing in traditional environment but will also introduce new marketing environment, internet. Social media and social media marketing will introduce some of the most popular social media channels the give the reader an overall understanding for the topic. Next thing is the content marketing as it plays big part todays marketing. Following part is introducing blogs and blog marketing with statistics to give some idea of blog marketing benefits. The background information of the case company is essential to be able to create the blog marketing plan which will be the result of this thesis.

2.3 Limitations

This thesis is limited, according the preferences of the case company, into blogs and blog marketing. Other social media explained in this research is necessary to gain

general idea of what tools the case company is using at the moment. This thesis has some limitations and boundaries. Firstly, it is important for the reader to understand that this thesis only considers blog marketing. Any other social media channel is not considered. Also the results only focuses into the blog marketing. Also thesis do not take part on studying search engine optimization (SEO) even if it is mentioned in further parts.

This is not implementation plan for the company but a suggestion for adding social media marketing tool to the case company's current social media marketing strategy, in this case a blog. Giving the company some advices and perspectives possibly to help the case company. This thesis does not editorialize in different blogging platforms as there are plenty. It is up to the case company to decide in which blogging platform they will use if they start writing a blog.

3 THE CASE COMPANY

Spartan Gear Ltd, founded 2012, is a small sized company located in Turku, Finland. Spartan Gear is owned and ran by three people. The same three people also own Spartan Sport Center which is offering customers fitness and gym services. Spartan Gear on the other hand is targeted to sell services such as fitness-, wellness- and instructor courses. Spartan Gear also targets on selling gym gear such as weights, gym clothing, and gym accessories targeting both companies and private customers. Spartan Gear's expertise is on kettlebell training, functional training and martial arts. (Website of Spartan Gear 2014.)

It is important to know the two companies since they are related in such many ways as the location of both companies are the same. The sales is done mostly via online shop but some of the sales comes from the gym Spartan Sport Center as many customers get interested of the products after using the gym services. Nevertheless this connection is not major in this project since the focus is on blog marketing only.

4 CURRENT SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY BRIEFLY

This part is an outcome of an interview of the owners of the case company but also a simple study of their Facebook, Instagram, YouTube- and webpage. This is to introduce the company's activity in the social media field.

Current marketing strategy is mostly on social media but as well fliers are used. Spartan Gear uses many different kind of online marketing tools such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, blogs but also Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and banners and sponsorships.

In Facebook Spartan Gear is promoting products and events. Sharing their own YouTube videos, their blogs and pictures. They are using a good balance between business and entertainment so people can not only follow them when they want to buy something but also relax and watch amusing videos or pictures. Facebook is the main tool where they can share their other social media input. (Spartan Gear Facebook page 2014)

Instagram is used for promoting products but also sharing various pictures of their athletes, gym and seminars but of course some off topic pictures to entertain followers. It is also embedded into Spartan Gear's webpage where pictures of Instagram can then be seen.

YouTube is used for educational- how-to videos for customers. This is where the case company uploads their videos about training and also informative videos how to use their certain products correctly or how to do a certain movements technique correctly (Spartan Gear YouTube-channel 2014).

Spartan Gear uses familiar names from different sports such as MMA (mixed martial arts), boxing, and fitness to promote their products via blogs or other social media. They also use sponsoring products for athletes and let them evaluate their products how they experienced them. This way the people following athletes see what kind of evaluation the athlete gives to the product. Many people who follow and read blogs

tend to purchase what seems to be good according to the athletes. Blogs are used to write about workout experience with their products. This way customer can read their favorite bloggers opinion on certain products.

These all connect in their social media plan as for example the company posts new video in YouTube, which will be promoted in Facebook with link to the video. If the company uploads new picture to Instagram, that will be also linked to Facebook and their webpage. Facebook is like their headquarters for marketing and all the others work with it. Nevertheless company still lack own blog which can be shared in Facebook also but pictures or videos that has been uploaded in Instagram or YouTube can be embedded to the blog to support the content in blogs.

5 MARKETING

Even if this thesis focuses solely in blog marketing still it is necessary to understand the definition of marketing. Also the traditional “four Ps of marketing” will be applied into more modern approach for blog marketing. The connection between traditional marketing mix and applied version for blog marketing can be noticed in the empirical part of the thesis.

5.1 Defining Marketing

According to Gabay, marketing is seen as companies the most complicated business tool. It is a tool with most influence and it needs to be planned all the time. The purpose of marketing is satisfying the customers but also to look into what are customers’ needs and wants but also, on the other hand, to create demand. “Marketing is the process of identifying, maximizing and satisfying consumer demand for a company’s products”. (Gabay 2003, 9.)

Marketing is wide topic and it is almost impossible to explain shortly. Most of the people reckon marketing as television and paper advertisements but this is only a

small part of big concept. Everyone has faced some sort of marketing in their lives. Marketing is somewhat everywhere and it is difficult to avoid. Shortly, marketing is a process of creating value to the customer and building relationships. (Armstrong & Kotler 2006, 5.)

Advertising is the most visible part of marketing and also most common mean for consumer marketing. Advertisements are bought space for visual or audio in purpose of attracting and creating customers. They are used in different kinds of media to approach as many people as possible and goal is to persuade, communicate, attract and inform certain groups of people. Common thing in all traditional advertisements is that they are all paid. (Karjaluo 2010, 36.)

5.2 Marketing mix in new environment

Marketing mix that is also known as “the 4 Ps of Marketing, was originally introduced by Jerome McCarthy and it has been used since that time. Marketing is being used as a marketing strategy to the company to clear the implementation of it. Marketing mix has originally four elements such as product, price, placement and promotion and it has been modified into wider strategy also with more elements. Internet has changed the marketing but still traditional elements applies as they can be modified and changed to fit the platform. Internet has given the marketers an opportunity to create more value to the product with it. (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer & Johnston 2006, 216.)

Transitioning into social media marketing is thoroughly brilliant idea. Social media marketing is exiting and even fun but marketer has to be careful when using them. Marketing is not only for attracting customers into your company website. It is important but not the purpose. Purpose is to get a customer to purchase a product or service. Even if company gets lots of click-throughs and traffic that does not mean they get any sales. Marketer has to keep in mind that when using social media marketing platforms, the same principles of marketing still applies. Long time ago introduced elements of marketing were called “the four Ps”. The four Ps comes from different elements such as product, price, placement and promotion. The elements are

used in marketing to make it easier to control marketing activities. When marketing in social media, marketer still has to consider these traditional marketing elements as they can help to define marketing goals. (Zimmerman & Sahlin 2010, 728.)

1. Product – The product is what the company is selling. It can be a good or service and it does not matter whether the transaction is based online or not. This element also include performance, warranties, support, variety, and size (Zimmerman & Sahlin 2010, 728). The decisions for modify existing products are based on the customers' needs. Usually the internet-based products are divided into core product and the extended product. The core product is the product that is being purchased by the consumer to fulfil their needs. Extended products are the services and benefits build around the core product. For example buying a mobile-phone, which is a core product, has warranty and follow-up technical service and these are considered as extended products. Internet can help adding value to the products with internet-based features and options. This applies mostly to the products and services than can be transformed into digital services; as an example, a book that can be transformed into e-book (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer & Johnston 2006, 217.)

2. Price – This simply consist of the factors how company is pricing their products and services. Nowadays consumers have it easy to compare prices in internet. This is also useful for a marketer as they can check competitors' web sites and products for offers and promotions where social media marketing takes large footing (Zimmerman & Sahlin 2010, 728). As price is one of the elements in marketing mix, it consist of prices for the products and services. Internet's impact on pricing is quite direct as for example start-ups tend to have lower prices than their competitors to create customer base. Internet has also impact on the customer service. The amount of customer service of products bought online is less than products that are bought in a physical location therefore the price of the online based products can be lower. (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer& Johnston 2006, 231.)

3. Placement – This refers how products and services are distributed to the consumers. Placement means the accessibility of products and services. Online

based shops need to serve their customers 24 hours a day. (Zimmerman & Sahlin 2010, 728.) In offline channels the aim of this element is to maximize the availability to the customers. In internet channels the aim is rather unclear as the meaning of accessibility is more complicated. The visibility is the keyword as only being visible can make customers aware of a certain product. Visibility includes search engines and online portals. (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, Mayer & Johnston 2006, 237.)

4. Promotion – This element includes all the different means to communicate with the customer. This is the part of attracting customers via suggestable communication. Marketer has to make consumers aware of the company's web page, social media platforms and activity online and offline. (Zimmerman & Sahlin 2010, 729.)

5.3 Marketing problem in changing environment

For the past 50 years the world has changed a lot but the operating model of marketing has not changed for decades. Marketing is often seen as interruptive type of advertising and communication created by professionals. Internet has changed the approach by causing a change in consumers' media- and communication behavior. Marketers are facing a problem to adapt to this change of communications caused by internet because now it is harder to reach bigger groups of consumers with marketing that is based on interrupting advertising. Advertisements fail to reach consumers mostly because consumers are lessening the amount of consumption of mass media or learn to avoid and block advertisements more efficiently. (Juslén 2009, 41.)

Juslén also states that consumers are using their new power in internet to transmit and publish information of the marketers and their activities. This kind of information refined by consumers is being considered to have more impact on purchase decision than advertisements and other marketers produced content. Consumers do not trust advertisements and they do not consider advertisements as necessary as they used to decades ago. (Juslén 2009, 42.)

The purpose of marketing is now to create procedures to get the consumers to be interested in the products and services and acquire loyal customers to tell other consumers about their positive experience. Today's marketing is not anymore about parallel communication but to create true interest, interaction and keeping promises. Marketing is now more about acquiring relationships and maintaining them with purpose to create customer satisfaction. (Juslén 2009, 42.)

5.4 Internet as new marketing environment

As marketing has changed to adapt into new environment, internet, pivotal reason was the transparency of internet. Transparency means that consumers now have more knowledge and power that they did not have before. When it comes to marketing in internet, the purpose is not to mesmerize consumers with visuals but to be honest and showing what is inside the package. According to Juslén, one of the notable characteristics of internet in marketing point of view is that sometimes company, product or service is being talked about even if the company did not mean to and something people say or do is going to stay in internet forever. This is why the transparency of company, products and services is important. This introduces the new rules of marketing:

Marketing is about people, not about your products.

Marketing is more than advertising.

Content is the most important tool of marketing.

The control over communication resettles to customer.

Marketing is about agreeing not forcing.

The ability for creating interaction and commitment is more important than brand awareness.

These new rules requires from marketers to adjust their point of view from products into customers and their needs. The will to study customers' problems and solve them is essential. Marketer has to understand that the control over the brand image is not only in their hands anymore but customers are there to create is too. (Juslén, 2009 70-71.)

6 SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

6.1 Social media and social media marketing

This part is to introduce social media with some of the most popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Blog and YouTube. These are the channels the case company is active and it is not necessary to list more social media channels.

As the world has turned more into social media, marketers have to be able to follow. Growth on social media created marvelous opportunities to communicate with customers faster, easier, and most important, cheaper. Social media also gave people the chance to be writers, critics, artists without all the bureaucracy. Giving people the power to introduce their own ideas and opinions, after all customers probably value more on other peoples' experiences on certain product rather than the speech on quality on company's advert. *"The world of marketing has also changed, and big-budget marketers no longer hold the power or have the influence they used to".* (Levinson & Gibson 2010, xii.)

As social media is a truly broad concept behind a simple idea, it can take many forms such as forums, message boards, weblogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures and video. This is only a short list of social media's possibilities. Social media also consists of some early forms such as instant messaging, picture-sharing, email, music-sharing (Evans, 2008, 33). Notable difference between social media marketing and traditional marketing is that traditional marketing is the participation with the customer before and after sales. Traditional marketing is purely more about someone in control of marketing decide what is it said about the product or service. In social media marketing the approach is different as customers can participate in evaluating, shaping and creating content. Reputation is created via participation and responsiveness. (Evans 2008, 80.)

When defining social media marketing, it is important to understand it is not a new world, it is just a new technique. Basically it is just modern approach of traditional marketing applying just the new tools using traditional idea from a different angle and approach. (Zimmerman & Sahlin 2010, 11.)

6.2 Facebook

Facebook is a networking type of social media. It helps people to connect and share with each other no matter where you are. Facebook is free for its users and it is used by individuals but also companies are using it for different purposes.

“Facebook is approaching over 400 million registered users globally, more than the entire population of the United States”.(Levinson & Gibson 2010, 66.)

Facebook became remarkable in such a short time as now almost everyone is using Facebook and it is sometimes even a must-have. There are applications and programs that require a Facebook-account due to run properly. Part of Facebook’s greatness comes from its accessibility as it’s used all over the world no matter what age people are. (Levinson & Gibson 2010, 66.)

6.3 Instagram

Instagram is an application you can use for taking and sharing pictures. It has its own integrated picture editing tool to add visual effects on your pictures and then publish it on your personal Instagram profile. The visibility of your pictures depends on your profile setting to public or private. You have an opportunity to follow certain profiles and other people can as well follow your profile. You also have the option to “like” a picture and leave a comment on them. Instagram is an application that can be installed on smart-phones or tablets. (Pönkä 2014, 121.)

6.4 YouTube

YouTube is the most popular video-sharing service. It gives anyone the opportunity to publish their own video content, whether the videos are professional studio quality or amateur quality short video clips filmed with mobile phones. Most of the users are still only watching videos instead of publishing own content. (Pönkä 2014 115.) YouTube is used by individuals but also profit seeking companies/marketers who use this platform to publish advertisement or promotional content. YouTube has several

hundred million video views per day which drives marketers greedily there. (Levinson & Gibson 2010, 82.)

6.5 Why to use social mediamarketing?

Levinson and Gibson stated that social media is one of the best ways to do marketing as it is in most cases free and reasonably fast. It is more accessible than any other marketing tool. This also a great opportunity for small business marketers because money is not the one that makes the rules anymore. Big businesses can spend lots of money on webpage, blogs and advertising which can give more traffic to the company but on the other hand, traffic is not the one that makes the sales. Reputation is what matters in the eyes of the customers as it is something that cannot be bought. As social media lets the word spread fast all over the world, so does the reputation of the company. Reputation does not increase with expensive advertisement but by how people perceive company's service and products and therefore what they have to say about the service they got in comparison what the company promised to give. A reputation therefore can be bad or good. A reputation must be earned. In social media, a good reputation can be earned by having great content and interactive conversations. Earning good reputation takes long time, even years but it can be lost really fast. A good marketer is seen as a person who is not only caring about making lots of sales but also interested in the customers in human level. Social media makes this a lot easier for a marketer as they can connect with the customer easily trough social web. A good marketer is also a responsive person, answering to questions and guiding customers but not getting angry on bad feedback and start arguing with people, instead he/she is going to be a peacekeeper and trying to make sure wrongs are made right. If a customer had a bad experience on service or product, marketers job is to find out what the reason was and to make sure customer will be as happy as possible. (Levinson & Gibson 2010, 58-59.)

Social media adds value to business in many ways. Some of the benefits compared into traditional communication are; smaller communication expenses and production expenses. As well reaching the target groups is a lot easier with social media rather

than traditional and the reaction time in communicating with customers decreases. (Merisavo, Vesanen, Raulas & Virtanen 2006, 45.)

Understanding the correct way of using social media is tremendously crucial as companies have to understand that they cannot choose whether they are seen in social web or not but they can choose whether to be seen in traditional media such as TV. (Evans 2008, 35.)

The variety of social media and cost-free environment gives businesses tools to reach customers day and night, inlands or abroad. Nevertheless if the company using social media or not, most likely it is going to be there as customers create their own threads for either asking something about certain products and how people experienced them. Guerrilla marketing was and is about using unconventional means to achieve conventional goals. It's about using creativity, innovation, community and relationships instead of big budgets to achieve marketing objectives. (Levinson & Gibson 2010, xii.)

7 BLOG

In this part we go through things every blogger should know, think about and apply. Introducing more detailed perspective of blogs and blogging, blogging itself is a simple idea consisting of various types of approach and styles. Interaction within a blog with customers creates personal approachable environment and helps the customer to see the marketer as approachable human. (Levinson & Gibson 2010, 91.)

7.1 Defining blogs

A blog is an online platform where anyone can write whatever they wish to write. Some are determined of getting audience and visibility. This is often seen as individuals' way to be authors of their lives but is being used quite often within companies for marketing purposes. A blog normally consist of text but it can also contain audio,

pictures or videos. Blogs are something where one can write about any content they want. It can be story, educational or even an own diary to post own thought. Blogs are seen as really interactive channels for people who wants to discuss about certain topics.(Levinson & Gibson 2010, 90.)

WordPress is one of the most popular platforms for blogging. It is free to use for everyone. It is a community for bloggers around the world and available in 50 languages where people add hundreds of thousands of blog posts daily. (Pönkä 2014, 124;Levinson & Gibson 2010, 91.)

7.2 The different types of blogs

According to WordPress there are plenty of different types of blogs. In this part will be briefly explained some of the different types of blogs. The type depends on the author's preference and professional background. Here are some of typical types of blogs:

Personal blog

This blog is the broadest blog category. In personal blogs authors can blog about topics from which probably the most popular ones are politics, music, traveling, health and fitness.

Business blogs

All kinds of professionals can write blog in their field of expertise. Business blogs are used by companies or individuals to share their professional opinions and to connect with the customers in more personal level.

Non-profit blogs

This type of blog is commonly used by foundations, charities, and human right groups for raise awareness and money for their causes.

Politics' blogs

These are blogs of politically active people or members of parliament, political parties, and government agencies to connect with their constituencies

Tutorial, how-to, and review blogs

These are blogs for sharing tips and reviews for the readers. Also for educational purposes for tutorials and how-to posts. (WordPress website 2015.)

7.3 Why use blog?

Even though a blog can be used and has been used for many times as a marketing tool, it doesn't necessarily mean that it was to contain advertisement per se. It can just be a normal blog of a normal person telling a story of a company, him/herself or just about the products. Even if it were a blog about a company or of its products, it can still be only a storytelling form of information and as one might think, everybody loves good stories. Using a blog clearly only as a marketing or advertising tool makes it boring and even could create negative image of a company. Adverts are everywhere, most people actually want to run away from them. People really don't want to read a blog consisting only advertisements but rather a nice-, relaxing-, interesting- or other way compelling story. (Schaefer & Smith 2013, 36.)

A good story can bring lots of good reputation. Good reputation will create a trust for a customer towards the company and trust will inevitably bring more customers.

Blogs in addition to creating higher sales and better awareness, it is also known to be used as a tool for research and development. Companies like Fiskars and Starbucks are using their blog for creating better products and service via customer needs and ideas. (Schaefer & Smith 2013, 68.)

There are plenty of success stories about how a small one person company grew larger by writing a blog only about their passion towards the thing they are doing. Good example of this is the owner of Beardbrand. Beardbrand is a company for beard and moustache products. (Website of Beardsmand 2015.) His story was shared in a blog of Shopify. Beardbrand owner Eric Bandholz was a member of a beard community and he used to blog about it. Inside the community he realized the de-

mand of such products and decided to create Beardbrand. According to Eric, he first launched Beardbrand as a blog. His blogs were about beard care and the lifestyle. Once Beardbrand was launched, they grew revenue from 1000 dollars per month to 40 000 dollars per month under a year. (Macdonald 2013.)

As it is mentioned before how Spartan Gear uses blogs with top fitness bloggers. They send a product or products to an independent blogger to freely evaluate it. This is truly important to understand that these bloggers have a free word to say anything about any product they get. So to do this a company must already be confident enough to let a product to be evaluated by a blogger who could say anything. Letting an independent blogger to test and evaluate is rather smart since if it is a good product, something that somewhat professional likes, imagine how the readers will think about that product. Surely that gives a trust to customers of a product if an experienced bodybuilder or fitness fanatic says how good it is. As this has been shown up to be really successful among other marketing tools, it is also mentionable that Spartan Gear do not have their own blog which could be seen as a gap in marketing.

7.4 Blog statistics

This part is demonstrating basic statistics to give an angle or an idea about blog marketing. Several aspects were taken into consideration in following chart. Some of the researches used in the statistics were done in the U.S. but it can be applied to other countries also as the principle of how social media works, is the same everywhere. In following statistics the results are an outcome of a surveys and reports conducted by BlogHer and Hubspot. More detailed information about how these surveys were conducted can be found in the Research Methods part.

Blog is been used more than it used to as its benefits has been noticed by marketers as according to the statistics, almost half of the population in U.S. reads blogs. Blog also seems to have strong impact on companies' ROI. According to the statistics, companies that prioritized blogging, enjoy stronger return on investment. (State of Inbound 2014, 7.)

Blog also has an enormous impact on indexed pages and links compared to a company which is not using a blog. The chart below is to demonstrate the correlation between indexed pages and lead growth. According to HubSpot growth on indexed pages has great impact on leads. Indexed pages are important for companies and to increase the indexed pages, HubSpot report conducted August 2009 consisted of 1531 customers, showed that from those respondents 795 blogged and enjoyed 55 percent more visitors, 97 percent more inbound links and 434 percent more indexed pages. (Burnes 2009.)

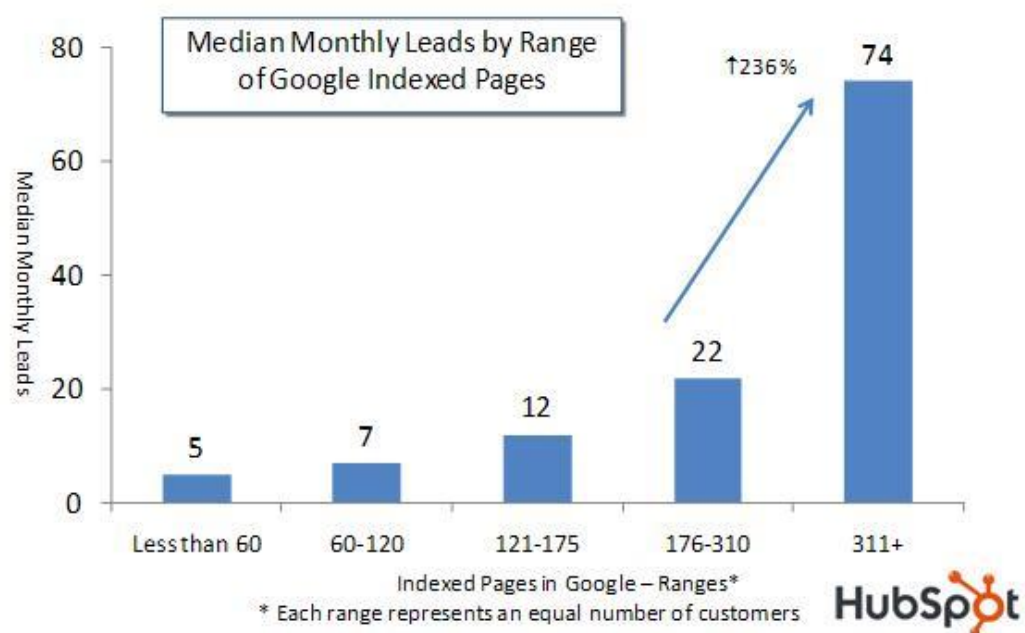


Figure 2. Indexed Pages in Google(Vaughan 2010)

Hubspot Benchmark from 7000+ Businesses- research study:

This research was conducted by Hubspot, company of professional marketing software developer and mentor. In this research Hubspot studied more than 7000 of its customers analyzing the key inbound marketing activities and traffic volume, and leads correlating those activities. According to the research, the amount of blog articles affected to the inbound traffic as it stated that over 15 blog articles a month generated more than twice as much traffic than in comparison to three to five articles a month. Blogs also have a great impact on creating leads as HubSpot stated that B2B companies that write blogs once or twice a month generated 70% more leads in com-

parison to companies that do not blog at all. HubSpot also stated in their statistics that increasing blog posts from three to five posts per month into six to eight posts per month almost doubles the leads. Also the number of total blog posts seemed to have an effect on number of leads as companies with over 200 blog articles have more than five times the leads than those with ten or fewer articles (Marketing Benchmark from 7000+ businesses, 29). Even the minimum effort for blogging seems to create a remarkable difference in marketing which is important more for small and medium sized companies who necessarily do not have potential resources for blog more frequently.

Blogher

Blogher conducted a survey 2012 about women's behavior in social media with total 2071 female respondents in BlogHer community and total U.S. online population sample. According to the survey, 81% of U.S. online consumers trust the information and advice from blogs they read. The research also studied into which social media affected the most on purchasing decision and blogs were stated the most trustworthy source for information as it was compared to Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. (Collins 2012.)

7.5 Setting up a blog

This part will not be detailed how-to type of chapter but to describe things that are necessary to consider when setting up a business blog. This also will not separate blogs and business blogs or any other types of blogs by definition. This is an overall look of the things a person or business should take into consideration when starting a blog. Most of this part is based on a book "Blogi Markkinointi" written by Kortesoja and Kurvinen.

First thing to consider is the topic, angle and the name. Good blog is a blog of the writer's passion. Whatever the topic is the writer needs to be compelled and enthusiastic to write about that. People who are going to read a blog will rapidly notice whether the topic is by passion or not. Therefore the easiest angle is to write about something that interests the writer. Once the angle or perspective is clear, it is important to

stay in that. When writing a professional blog, it is important not to write so called “life blog” where to write about everything. That makes the topics too wide. It is far better to stick with a clear range of topics. Not too narrow and not too wide.

The name is something that writer will create to be remembered and noticed. It can refer the topics or other name that is easy to recognize. There are some tools to help in choosing the name. It can be a term or a word of your business or related to the business or topics. Good idea is to write a blog with own name as it is permanent. Nobody else then cannot use that name. It also helps to make the writer more known amongst the audience. Bad thing about writing a blog in the name of the business because if the name changes, more likely the benefits of a strong brand name can be lost. Kortesuo and Kurvinen states that the next thing is to be sure what kind of audience a blog is to attract. To set up some goals into the blog helps to reach more out of it. Goals can be such as reaching certain amount of visitors, followers or readers or even a rank to a certain level in a search engine. Audience, the target group, needs to be clear. To whom is that blog meant to. If the purpose is only to earn money then the target group should be willing to make a purchase. If the purpose is to attract other businesses it is important to focus on attracting with brilliant and useful content. When choosing the target group, size does matter. Bigger target group equals more possible visitors. Language plays big part of the target group as it is already targeting into certain people. (Kortesuo & Kurvinen 2011, 56-58.)

Title of blog posts has to be set effectively. The title should describe what the post is about and why someone should read it. Many times the decision to read a blog post is made from the title. (Kortesuo & Kurvinen 2011, 68). The title also is a tool for search engines such as google a keyword to rank the blog. Blogs can also have an effect on company’s traffic. Search engines finds everything via keywords which are the words or phrases used in search. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) defines how easily a website can be found with search engines using certain keywords. It’s an important technique to guide customers into your site or blog. SEO is the process of making blog posts rank higher therefore making it easier for people to find it. A first-page listing on Google can create traffic into your blog by hundreds of visitors if the keywords are set correctly. (Shaefer & Smith 2013, 106.) According to Zimmerman and Sahlin, blogs should be updated often as that makes the search engines rank

websites with blogs rank higher than the ones without (Zimmerman & Sahlin 2010, 210.)

Although social media marketing is a powerful force, search engines are still the top referral source for most blogs. Setting keywords correctly can be difficult. Everyone who is not a SEO pro, can have hard time setting keywords correctly due to optimize the search engine benefits. There is still tools to use to get more sense of it and make it easier to set up the keyword. With the All in One SEO plug-in it is possible to modify the keywords according what is best for a specific topic. It also has automated option to set up correct keywords that fit the topic perfectly. Keywords and tags help search engines to find your blog posts easier. (Levinson & Gibson 2010, 94.)

8 CONTENT MARKETING AND BLOGGING

Inbound marketing and content marketing are rather difficult to separate but it is important to understand that they mean different things. In many cases when trying to understand as definition either content marketing or inbound marketing the answer is similar. This is because content marketing is one part of bigger manifold, inbound marketing. The purpose of inbound marketing is the opposite of traditional outbound marketing. Outbound marketing means advertisements that are interruptive such as TV advertisements or internet advertisements. Therefore inbound marketing's purpose is to be compelling, something that customers can easily find when searching for information. It is to help customers to make purchase decisions rather than obtrude products. Inbound marketing's purpose is to create a content about what customer is willing to receive, something they want to read or see. It is to make advertisements for customers when they want to receive it. (Juslén 2009. 135.)

“Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action.”(Website of Content Marketing Institute 2007.) This means that even though it is marketing, it is

not necessarily looking like marketing. Average marketing content is always obviously advertising products but in content marketing the purpose is different but the wanted outcome is the same.

Content marketing is used to attract customers from a different angle, not by forcing advertisement or banners or pop-ups but to create a content people are actually looking forward to see. Content marketing doesn't work like traditional methods. The point is not to praise itself but it is to let the reader to choose whether the author is reliable and good. If the content is something readers love, obviously they are going to think positively about the author or content. The purpose is not to hold crucial information but in content marketing it is about sharing everything. (Kortesuo & Kurvinen 2011, 72.)

9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This thesis is to provide a blog marketing plan to acquire new customers and build a better relationship between the customers and the company. Necessary information was gathered for the theoretical part which includes marketing, social media, social media marketing, content marketing and blog marketing.

Research methods divides into quantitative and qualitative methods. Typical characteristics for quantitative research is a causal point of view as it believes that all the knowledge is based on logical speculation and sensory perception. Thus quantitative research is conducted with numerical data including surveys and questionnaires. Statistical conclusion is often done with quantitative method. This thesis research method is qualitative since in this thesis a survey was not conducted in this thesis even if some statistics were used to back up when studying the benefits of blog marketing. This was used to help in demonstrating the usefulness of blog marketing in average. Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara states that qualitative research is commonly thought as a something not measured with numerical data but with quality. In this context quality doesn't necessarily mean literally a quality of a product but its pur-

pose is to answer to questions that ask if something is comfortable. There is no indicator which shows the comfortable level of it but rather studying how the quality is perceived. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 140.)

As said, in this thesis no survey were conducted, only a brief interview with the head of marketing personnel of Spartan Gear. This interview was done to understand the current situation of the company in the field of social media marketing. The interview gave a superficial insight of Spartan Gear's strategy but also their goal of this thesis. Also the author's past work experience with the company is helpful as the knowledge of the company is strong.

In this thesis statistics were used to support to describe blog marketing benefits. The statistical part is based on surveys conducted by BlogHer and HubSpot. BlogHer is a blogging community and it created a survey about women's behavior in social media. This survey was fielded 2012 to total 2071 females. Hubspot is an internet marketing company and it creates annually inbound marketing reports and marketing surveys. Their surveys are mostly fielded for their customers but also to independent marketing professionals, managers and executives. Report, "More Pages Indexed by Google Means more Leads", created in 2009 consisted of total 1531 respondents. Hubspot's report State of Inbound 2014 is a research of 3750 respondents. In Hubspot's "Marketing Benchmarks from 7000+ Businesses" research they surveyed 7000 of their own customers. These sources were used to get a directional view of blog marketing benefits. In this part quantitative data was used to support qualitative point of views.

It was mentioned in the beginning that an interview was conducted to have better understanding of the company and their marketing activity in the field of social media. Thus this interview was merely a casual conversation between the head of marketing of the case company and the author. So there was no planned interview questions.

The author has a year of experience on writing blogs, many years of personal interest on blogs, and several years of experience of the case company has helped the author to understand blog marketing in real life but also about fitness field of business. The experience has an impact on the empirical part of the thesis. Empirical part was con-

ducted by using theory, past experience on this specific topic but also benchmarking of successful blogs was done to get different point of views into comparison of remarkable blogs to create a blog marketing plan for the case company. Benchmarking helps to get ideas but also to realize different approaches, techniques and tactics that are used in blog marketing by successful companies. As it was mentioned that Beardbrand's, Fiskars' and Starbucks' blogging tactics are brilliant therefore their blogs are being benchmarked in this thesis. According to the learning website Alison.com benchmarking is the process of comparing companies' performance to the bests in the industries. Benchmarking consists of identifying the best companies in the same industry and studying, and comparing it. (Website of Alison 2015.) A portion of the empirical part was conducted by applying traditional marketing mix "the four Ps of marketing" for blog marketing approach. This is because traditional marketing has to be modified to work with modern practices in social media and especially in blog marketing.

Also to be mentioned in this stage of the thesis that the blog for Spartan Gear has already been on planning stage. As the author has been working with Spartan Gear before and also helping them with writing the blog. The blog is in a planning stage and nothing has been published yet. Same ideas will be introduced also in the empirical data that has been planned in the actual blog.

10 BLOG MARKETING PLAN

As in the beginning we could see that Spartan Gears social media marketing is already rather diverse. After understanding the theory of social media marketing and considering the existing social media marketing strategy, it can be noticed that Spartan Gear is not authoring their own blog even though they are using blogs as a marketing tool. This creates a gap in the social media marketing. Social media marketing is like a cycle. All the used formats of social media demonstrate a one part of the existing strategy in the cycle because they all support each other. Now, not having an

own blog creates a gap in the cycle and thus it is not complete. Once the cycle is complete it maximizes the potentiality of attracting customers (figure 3).



Figure 3. Social Media optimization (KinBloggers 2015)

Interesting thing about blog is on top of its popularity is the fact that it can be shared in multiple channels of social media. A Blog works like SEO and combining the blog with all other social media it can improve Spartan Gear's visibility remarkably. All the used social media support each other and helps customers to find content in several places increasing the probability of finding to the online shop and make purchase.

While author's experience on writing a blog is less than a year, it still has taught that blogs work really well with other social media tools, especially YouTube because it lets you to embed the videos from YouTube into a blog post making it easier for the reader. Not only YouTube, but also many other platform such as Instagram or Facebook are built with similar option where pictures can be embedded to blogs.

Following will apply the information studied in the theory part of the thesis and uses it as a background to support author's approach. The four Ps of marketing will be applied but instead of looking it with traditional point of view, in this part it will be applied to work with blog marketing.

The four Ps, product, price, placement and promotion does not work in blog marketing if it is used in traditional methods. Therefore they must be looked at truly different angle and perspective to be able to apply them in innovative way for proper and usable approach for blog marketing purposes. This part is based on author's point of view of what are best practices according to the information in theory part combined with the author's own experience on the field of writing a blog.

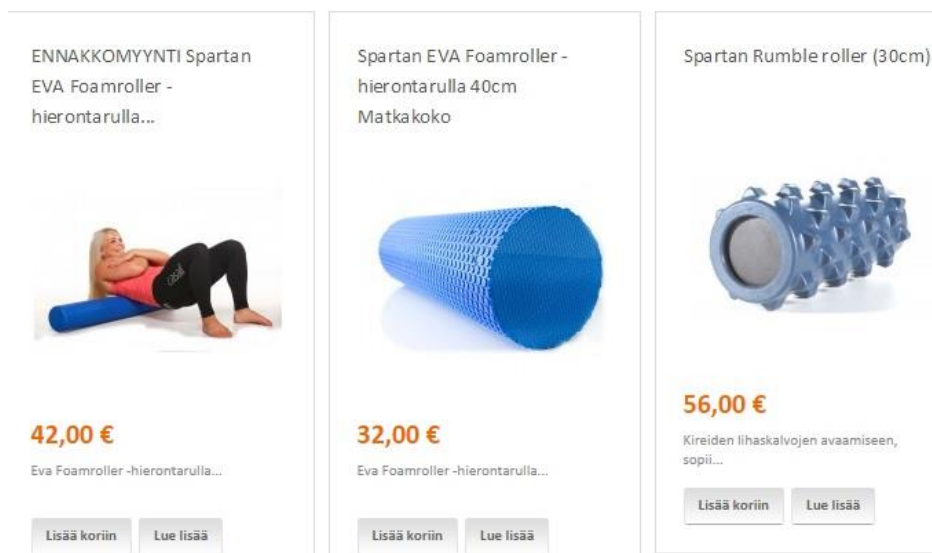
10.1 Product and content

The thing that is necessary to understand that even though this part is applying the traditional marketing mix where product means an actual product or service. In blog marketing, the content is the product, what the article is about. Of course it can contain informative product articles but mostly blogs are not about promoting a product per se. It can be seen as a different approach than for example Facebook (picture 1). Facebook is more direct marketing tool. Blogs are more related to have useful content what is pulling customers to read it.



Picture 1. Spartan Gear Facebook page promotion (Spartan Gear Facebook 2015)

The case company offers many products and services for the customer. But unlike in Facebook where the company promotes their products and services and arrange campaigns and sales, in blog marketing the product is the content, not the actual product like kettlebell. In this case the product is also their competence, expertise and knowledge. So there's two ways the case company can use blogs for marketing. The case company's blog is about educational information and how-to tutorials and articles therefore they can write about a product. Informative article about how to use for example a foam roller (picture 2). Foam roller is simple tool for taking care of muscle wellbeing. The fact is that the product is easy to use but it requires some techniques to master it, only then the potential benefit can be achieved. When using foam roller to release muscle pain, soreness and tension, it requires some knowledge of muscle anatomy and structure to get the best benefits out of the product. There are many products that need lots of technique thus it is beneficial for the customers to have a support after buying a product. The support is good for the communication with the customers but also to build better relationships and keeping up the customer satisfaction. An article about how to use their products is at least useful for the customers who already have obtained a certain product but it is also good to get new customers by writing interesting professional content of products that help to achieve a certain goal.



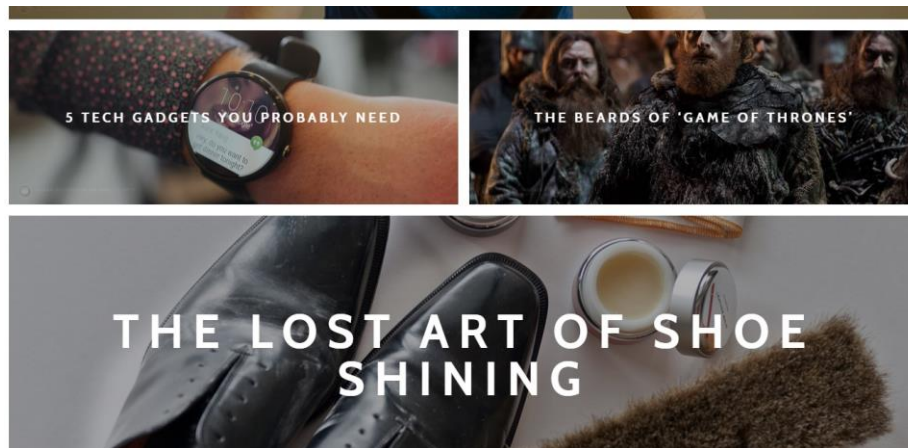
Picture 2. Spartan Gear foam roller (Spartan Gear online shop 2015)

The other approach is to write articles of not necessarily related to the products at all but also to give reader useful information about training in general and also about other things such as stretching and other body care topics. This way the readers can also see that the company cares about them by giving useful information that is not promoting their own products. This approach is generally good for building reputation. This approach consist of workout patterns and techniques for different kinds of movements. As an example a content could be a workout pattern with slam ball exercise. First explaining what is a slam ball, then going through different movements and techniques with it and followed by a workout routine. This approach is good for readers looking for new workout routines but also for people who are looking for exercises especially for slam ball.

A secret for a good blog lies in a content the author loves. Whether the topic is a hobby, self-development, expertise or your company, show your passion. Readers will notice easily if the author is passionate of the topic. (Kortesuo & Kurvinen 2011, 17.)

Spartan Gear has a great opportunity to create interesting content as a company that consist of professionals in their business area. They have years of expertise and in growing market. Spartan Gear staff has instructor level background in self-defense, MMA (mixed martial arts), combat training, functional-, and kettlebell training. According to their background, they could write content about training and give training tips.

Good example for great content, as it was mentioned in theory part, is BeardBrand blog. BeardBrand mastered content marketing in such a short period and it paid off the company quickly. Their passion and devotion on their business was reason for their sensational success but also how they implemented their marketing was a major reason. This is where content marketing has been successful. They have a widely spread blog about everything from lifestyle to tips for grooming beards.



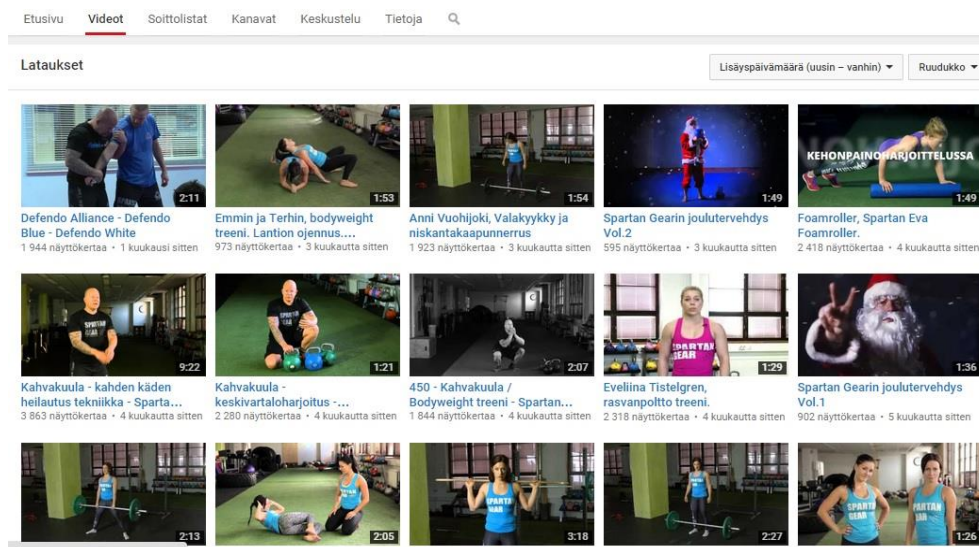
Picture 3. BeardBrand articles (BeardBrand 2015)

When it comes to writing a blog, content itself plays bigger part of the marketing than anything else. Compare it to Facebook posts which are mostly short and promoting products or sales. As in Figure 6 it can be seen that the content BeardBrand writes is not about promoting their products but writing a content that can be seen really compelling such as “the beards of game of thrones” blog post. Now to this posts will be audience from people who are fans of Game of Thrones television show and beard enthusiastic people. Thus the topic is what allures the visitors and content is what keeps them reading.

Spartan Gear staff has long history in teaching self-defense, martial arts, functional training and instructional training. Therefore the content should be on this area making it, first of all, easy to write content about since the many years of experience in field but also to be convincing enough to be seen as a professional. Self-defense and martial arts are not that popular to be good topic for writing a blog. But training and fitness blogs are one biggest trend at the moment. Because Spartan Gear’s background in instructing customers to train correctly their content to blog should be tutorial type or educational type of blog.

Visualizations are adding value to the content, making it more interesting. Using guiding pictures also makes the content easier to adjust for the readers. Most of the blogs contains some kind of visuals to support the text. As well Spartan Gear should be using pictures amongst the instructional/educational content to make it easier to understand. Also as Spartan Gear has their own YouTube channel, blogs works with

that really well. There is an option on most blog platforms to link a YouTube video or embed the desired video and now that video is part of the content without the need for the reader to open YouTube. And as it can be seen (picture 4) that Spartan Gears YouTube has plenty of content. A lot of it is instructional content which can perfectly be used with the blog.



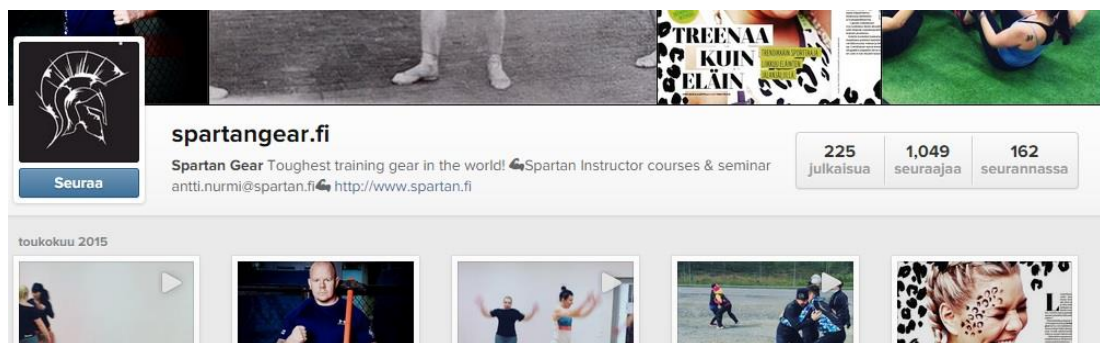
Picture 4. Spartan Gear YouTube channel

10.2 Price

In this part will be explained how the price could be interpreted when it comes to blog marketing. First of all, the traditional marketing mix price is the price of a product. But in blog marketing approach, instead of price the focus should be on value. The price is the time the customer will spend to read the blog post. Just like a price of a computer, customers will compare and decide if it was worth its price. Instead, now the reader will see if the content is valuable enough to spend time to read it. As Kortesoja and Kurvinen stated that good blog is a blog of the writer's passion. (Kortesoja & Kurvinen 2011, 58.) It is impossible to say beforehand if the customer will decide whether the content is valuable, worth the time, but when writing a blog, the case company can only write about topics that their expertise. Now the people who are interested about those topics that are the case company's field the readers will see that the information is valuable, written by professionals.

10.3 Placement

In traditional marketing mix the placement means the location of the company or store, but in internet environment the location does not matter since it is accessible for all the people who have possibility for internet. Accessibility is what matters the most in internet environment based companies. The same applies for the blog. How it can be accessed and how it can send readers to the website of the case company. Placement is about the connection between the company website and the company's blog and other social media channels. Great thing about social media channels is that company's other channels can be shared in another. Company's website can be shared in Facebook, Instagram (picture 5) and YouTube but all of these can also be shared in each one of them. This makes social web more accessible. This way the customers that are active on certain channels can find the company easier. If Instagram user finds the Instagram page of Spartan Gear, he/she might go to the webpage just because of the interesting pictures. Same applies with the blog, when Facebook user finds the Spartan Gear Facebook page and likes what he/she sees, there is a possibility that he/she goes to the blog if it is linked in the Facebook page.



Picture 5. Spartan Gear Instagram page (Spartan Gear Instagram 2015)

Blogs can be shared in Facebook, company's website and YouTube, but great thing about blogs are that they work with search engines creating more links when correct keywords are searched for example in Google. In part 6.3 Statistics it can be learned that blogs create links not only to the blog itself but also to the website it is connected. So when Spartan Gear will create the blog and set up correct keywords for blog posts and the website is linked with the blog therefore all the searches that are made

with the keywords used in the blog posts help the company website to be more visible in search engines.

10.4 Promotion

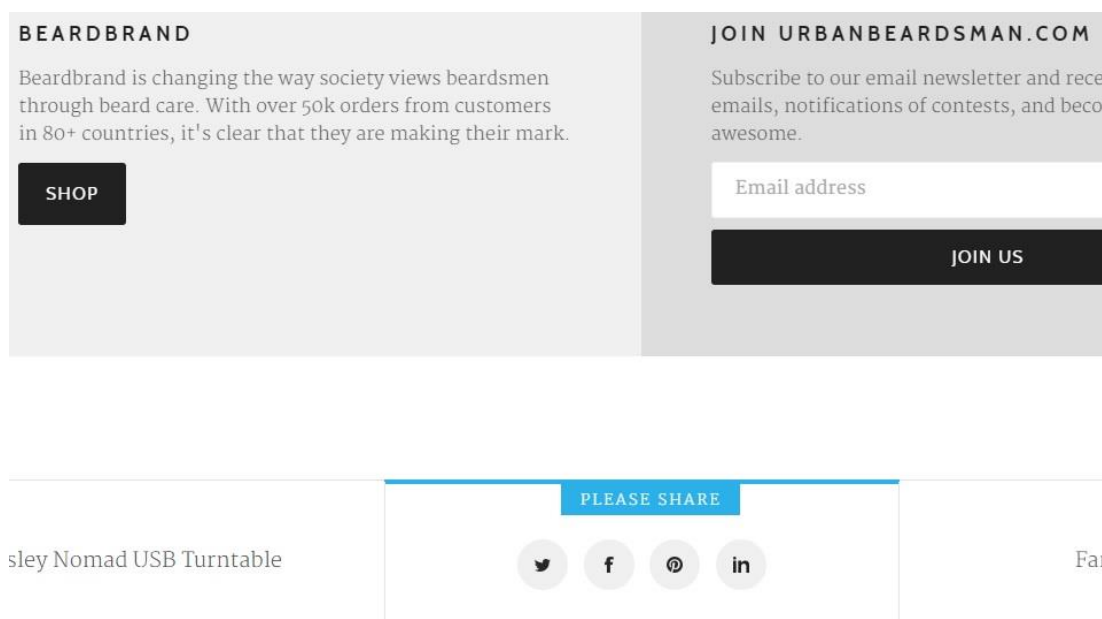
Promotion goes really far hand in hand with the placement in this context. To make blog accessible, it needs to be promoted somehow. As it was mentioned in previous part, social media channels lets you to promote your other channels in a specific channel. Facebook is probably one of the most interactive social media channel when it comes to sharing information and links from another channels. Therefore Spartan Gear needs to use Facebook to inform about their blog like they are doing at the moment with cooperatives' blogs (picture 6). This way the Spartan Gear's Facebook followers will be noticed of the company's activity in other channels such as blogs.



Picture 6. Spartan Gear Facebook article link (Spartan Gear Facebook page 2015)

But the promotion works the other way around. If the blog is being found before the website or other social media channels, then the blog must promote the case company's other channels. As it can be seen in Beardbrand blog that they have direct link in their blog to their online store. The blog also offers an option to join or "subscribe" to their email newsletter and on the bottom of the page there is links to Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and LinkedIn. This is how they ensure the accessibility of the different channels. That is something the case company must add to their blog marketing. Even if the case company do not have their own email newsletter they can offer something else, links to Instagram, YouTube and Facebook. The link to the online

shop is also brilliant idea after every blog post especially if the blog post consist of product information or educational content.



Picture 7. Urban Beardsman Share buttons (Beardsmanblog 2015)

10.5 Target groups

This is not an implementation but a research and therefore a suggestion how Spartan Gear, or any other company could optimize their existing or potential blog. Assuming of course that the company is existing and they have products or brands like Spartan Gear already has. As earlier mentioned, Spartan Gear is providing gym gear, clothing, and training education.

At the very beginning one must decide the target group, who do you want to write to and what is the purpose of your blog. Thus choosing a target group carefully helps in planning the content the topic and scheduling. If the purpose is to earn income, the target group must be able to pay and willing to buy. On the other hand if the purpose is more to grow awareness and building reputation in certain circles then the target groups should be part of these circles. (Kortesuo & Kurvinen 2011, 27.)

On this case, the target group is fitness oriented people. People who are interested in functional-, kettlebell-, bodyweight-, or contact sports, and gym gear and gym cloth-

ing. More precisely, people who are more or less committed to healthy lifestyle and care about their wellbeing, are willing to spend their money on special products.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

This part is a recommendation for the case company created with a support of statistics and benchmarking. Benchmarking was made by comparing and studying two successful blogs, Starbucks and Fiskars. Starbucks has two different blogs, another one is a blog about the company and their products but also about the company's responsibility. The other one is MyStarbucksIdea which consist individuals ideas for Starbucks. Fiskars blog is called Fiskateers. It consist of Fiskars community of professional hand crafters and enthusiasts.

11.1 Fiskars & Starbucks as an example

Benchmarking is good tool for companies to measure and compare performance, and attributes from past to present due to plan the future but also to compare your company performance into others'. (Website of Study 2015.)

As Shaefer and Smith mentioned in their book, *Born to Blog*, about creating reputation, Fiskars and Starbucks seem to have really strong reputation and they know how to build it. Their blogging methods and tactics are simply effective. (Schaefer & Smith 2013, 68.)



Picture 8. Fiskateersfrontpage (Fiskateers2015)

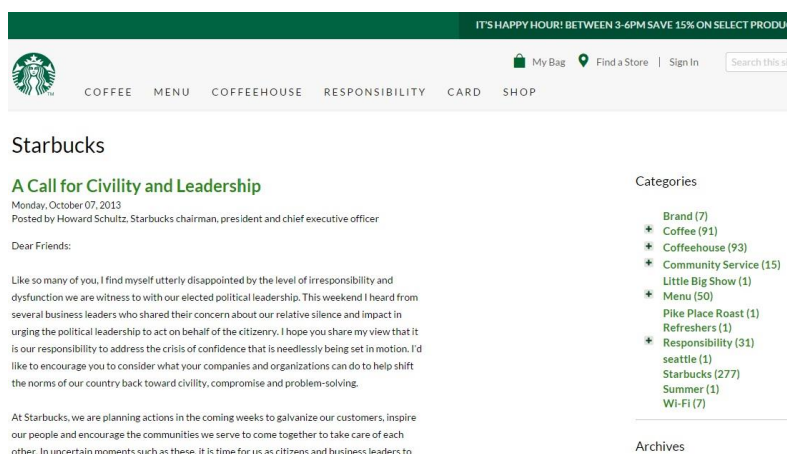
Fiskars' blog "Fiskateers" is community style blog consisting of handcraft enthusiasts and professionals. This blog was started in 2005 when Fiskars was looking to communicate and connect with their customers, the ones that were using Fiskars' products. In this blog site members can share their handiwork and talk how they created it. The content is diverse as writers can all use their imagination and skills what to create and write about.

In a marketing point of view this is simply effective and thoroughly free and what is the most interesting part, the writers are now part of Fiskars' marketing "team". In the blog there's no promotions on their products or prices or even much mention of the company. And it is obviously working for the company. Let the customers show how to use certain products and what a skilled hand crafter can do with it. This is a good example of content marketing. How-to tutorials also seem to be compelling for the people. Fiskateer blog is probably one of the best forms when it comes to connectivity and communicating with the customers.



Picture 9. Fiskateers cushion tutorial(Fiskateers 2015)

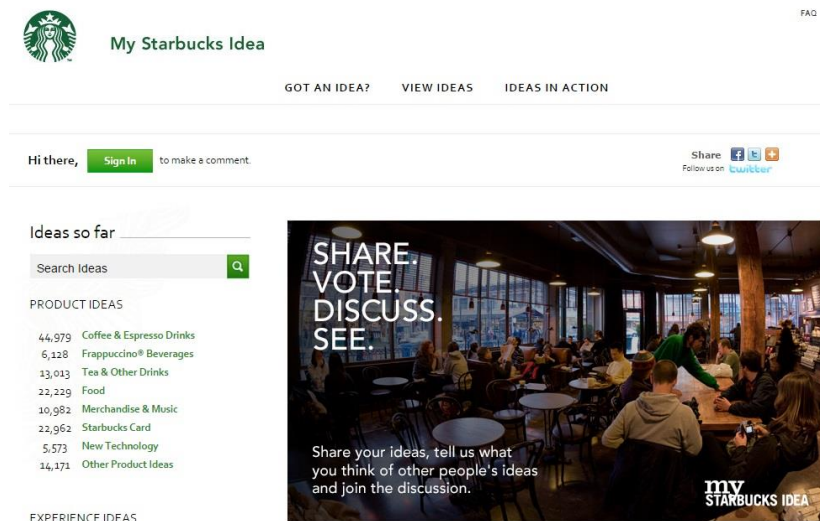
Starbucks is one of the biggest coffee shop chains in the United States. Starbucks' blog is truly informative of their wide range of products, not only giving information of their products but also how the company is doing and more precisely – what it is doing. In their blog they have detailed information of coffee products, menus, and nutritional information but also about responsibility and environment.



Picture 10. Starbucks blog front page(Starbucks blog 2015)

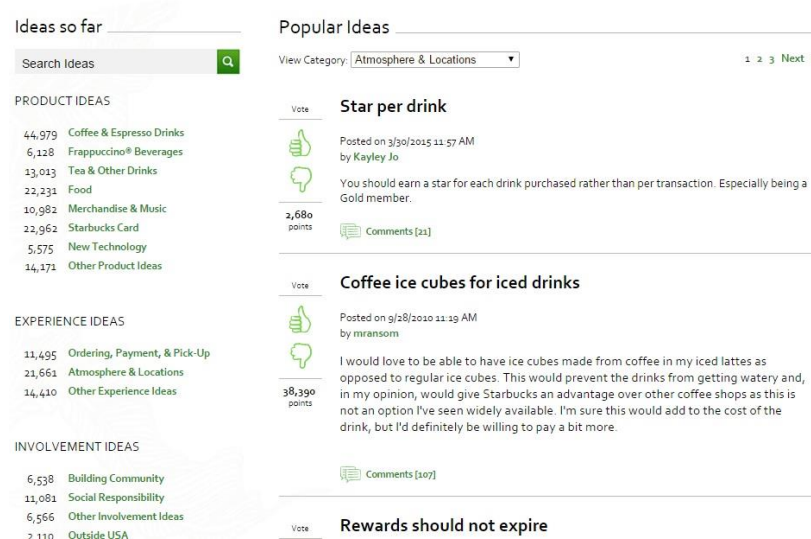
Again in the marketing point of view, maybe the more interesting thing Starbucks does is in their My Starbucks Idea – site (picture 11). This is a place for a customers, and why not non-customers, where they can share their ideas for products to be im-

proved or new ideas for creating a new product. There people can discuss about the products and ideas but also vote for the good ideas.



Picture 11. MyStarbucksIdea frontpage (Mystarbucksidea 2015)

Starbucks realized the power of people and decided to utilize it. Million people have more ideas than ten people and this what this site is all about. And it is not only having good ideas but it is part of the interactive community that keeps people interested. Any visitor can see the ideas that have been posted. To submit own ideas and vote for others' ideas registration is necessary. Visitors can vote for ideas "thumbs" up or down. It can be seen that some of the ideas receive tens of thousands votes and some even hundreds of thousands. Only this tells how customers love being observed and this is also great idea for the company to show customers that they do care about customer experience.



Picture 12. MyStarbucksIdea popular ideas(Mystarbucksidea 2015)

11.2 Interactivity

Just like Fiskars and Starbucks, Spartan Gear could apply similar methods for connectivity with the people for building a community and stronger participation with the customers. Building strong reputation is important, maybe more important than many other goal companies reach. To build the reputation company must be interactive with people and connect with them in human level and not being seen as a company. Spartan Gear could use blogs for interact and communicate with people. Applying My Starbucks Idea Spartan Gear could create a platform where they could ask or communicate with people about their ideas, what kind of products or services they would be interested. Fiskars blog “Fiskateers” consists of professional hand crafters but also of some enthusiast and this is also something Spartan Gear could apply. Encouraging people who buy Spartan Gear’s products to write about the experience but also write about new ideas how it can be used and what can be done with it for the other people to read.

11.3 Language

Language does matter. If the goal is to succeed with the blog, the target group is crucial; nevertheless only writing in Finnish can decrease the size of the target group. It is always good to consider more than one language like English which is one of the most used language (Kortesuo & Kurvinen 2011, 51.) Since Spartan Gear’s goal is to attract customers across Finland but also from abroad, it is a good idea to write content in both, Finnish and English. This enhances the probability of getting more readers. According to WordPress website, over 409 million people view more than 17, 6 billion pages each month and all of this content up to 71 percent is written in English. (Website of WordPress 2015.) In case of lack of resources such as time, writing a blog in two languages takes a lots of time therefore can be too much for a small company. Focusing on only one language is more time saving and gives an opportunity to write more frequently. Also to be considered, written language has to be with good grammar. Articles or blog posts does not radiate professionalism if the grammar is something a child would write. The great thing about blogs is that the grammar used does not have to be perfect either. Keeping this in mind Spartan Gear

can start the blog with any language they want to but it is important that the writer have good grammar in that specific language.

11.4 Timing

Timing plays a crucial part when it comes to optimizing the benefits of a blog. There are several questions needed to be asked when writing a blog. Therefore it is important in the beginning to decide how often the company should write into their blog. There are plenty of factors influencing how often company should blog.

Frequency

The resource allocation should be always according to what is good for the company. Depending how important and useful the company will think blogging is, they will decide how much effort and time they should put on writing a blog.

There are lots of researches of how important it is to blog daily as this gives more benefits to the SEO. Nevertheless writing a blog is not always possible for a company thus they should at least choose to write regularly, at least once a week. Depending on the resources of course, the company should always post the same week day to create stability but also it is easier for readers to start following blog posts if there is regularity. Statistics based on a HubSpot conducted report that B2B companies that blog only 1-2 times per month generated 70% more leads than companies that did not blog. This is important to keep in mind for any company as even a smallest effort can make big difference.

If Spartan Gear considers the time to be the issue, it is important for them to understand statistics. They help a lot when it comes to understanding its benefits. It is preferable for Spartan Gear to blog at least once a week. But as it is learned, that posting blogs more frequently adds more visitors directly, according to the statistics. Only 15 or more blog posts per month can generate five times more traffic to Spartan Gear's website than those companies not using blogs. And it goes further. Regular blog posts not only generate more readers it also generates permanent links to company website. HubSpot stated in their statistics that companies that have 200 or more blog

posts have more than five times the leads than companies with ten or fewer blog posts. This is precisely why Spartan Gear should write regularly. Reaching 200 blog posts is difficult but blog marketing is not about generating sales fast, it is more about building a strong reputation and place for people to communicate and to learn.

12 PROBLEMS WITH BLOG MARKETING

Of course blog has its problems, as any other thing. Generally it is a good idea for the case company or any company to widen their marketing activities into blog marketing as it has lots of benefits and positive impact to brand image and company reputation. But after all the good, there must be something bad also. Even if blogs can bring a lot of reputation, just like in other social media channels, it can also destroy it or at least harm it. Also blogs are really time-consuming especially for someone who wants to have the most of it as a marketing point of view and the return of investment in blogging is slower than in other social media channels. To get readers to your blog it can take long time and lots of dedication before it pays off. Also having a blog means that the writer or in this case, the case company, must have enough new content regularly to be beneficial for the company but also for the reader. Irregular blogging gets irregular customers. Marketer needs to post regularly to create a regular feed for customers to read. Blog posts for example every Monday and Thursday regularly helps the customers to know that a certain day there is new posts. (Sweeney 2009, 305-307.)

13 CONCLUSION

This thesis started with a theoretical part of introducing the case company, marketing, social media, and social media marketing, and content marketing. Theoretical part is crucial to understand before any kind of decisions could be made. From many tools of marketing, a blog was chosen to be studied. Blog marketing as a concept is not a new idea but probably more challenging than most of the social media marketing tools. The purpose was to create a blog marketing plan for the case company Spar-

tan Gear. The study also includes the benefits of blog marketing using statistics as a background as well.

The outcome of the thesis is to produce blog marketing plan for the case company applying different sources that is handled in the theory part. The empirical part did not contain survey but the information was used from sources such as books and internet articles and statistics to create the plan. This plan is not an actual implementation of the blog marketing for the case company but to give important point of view for the case company to be able to implement their own plan using this blog marketing plan as support.

Spartan Gears goal out of this thesis was to get an idea about what they could use to add strategically beneficial marketing tool into their existing social media marketing. Purpose was to find a marketing tool good for reaching out to more customers cost beneficially. Blogging might not be the fastest to reach new customers but it certainly is one of the greatest when it comes to impressing expertise and knowledge and most of all, gaining reputation. This is also great tool when it comes to marketing abroad. By choosing their language Spartan Gear can attract certain target group, like writing in Finnish, probably the readers will be from Finland. On the other hand if they choose to write in English, target group certainly grows multiple times as there is lot more English speaking people. As it was mentioned earlier, blog works as its own SEO thus making it visible and accessible to people abroad.

This thesis brought wide range of positive point of views why the company should start blogging. This should ease the decision making on whether to blog or not. Even if the resources are limited it is still proven to be worth trying as even the minimal effort is better than none. This thesis shows great deal about blog marketing and the understanding the blogs should be different after reading this. As this is not an implementation or there is no detailed “how-to” instructions this should still be helpful in many cases.

Suggestions for further development:

The next step for the case company is to choose the name of the blog. Name should be considered carefully as it is there to stay. Also the name should be something the

writer know will last. The next big things are topic and angle. These parts are where the writer chooses the target group. When these are clear the company must decide in which platform the blog is going to be written. According to the options for social media sharing and personal perspectives, the case company should choose their blogging platform according to their needs. The blog platform should also feel easy to use and comfortable enough. Then applying these information in this thesis a company can start blogging with statistical proof of its benefits.

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